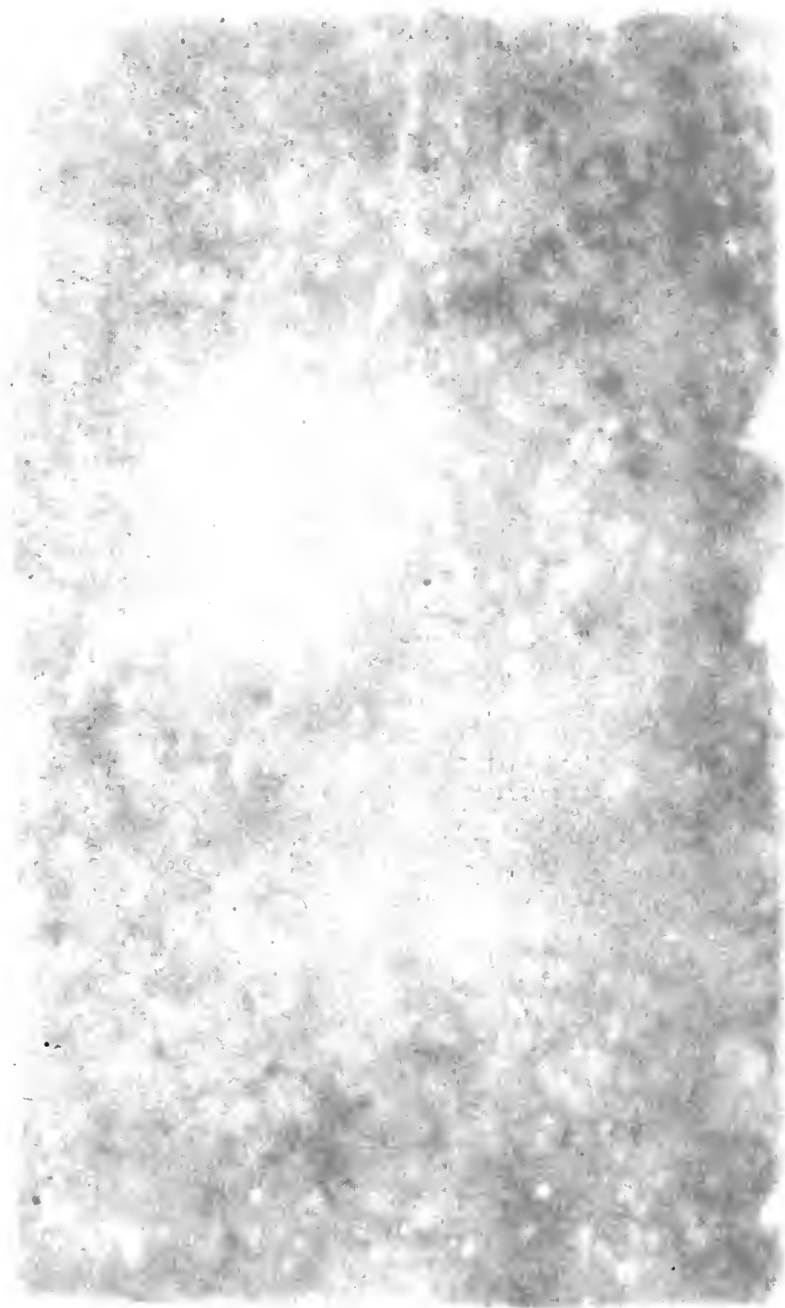


ORGEAS AND MIRADOU

FREDERICK WEDMORE

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ORGEAS AND MIRADOU

WITH OTHER PIECES

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# Orgeas and Miradou

WITH OTHER PIECES

BY  
FREDERICK WEDMORE

*' Nous ne sommes que par l'âme '*

LONDON

JAMES BOWDEN

10, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

1896



UNLIKE the imaginative pieces in my other volumes, those which here follow are bound together by no common name. The connection between them is not obvious enough to warrant it. Yet to the work of any one mind, however varied it may endeavour to be, limits which cannot be transgressed are set quite surely ; and, without repetition, there must needs be relationship. Besides, one has one's moods ; and, it seems to me, the present pieces—different indeed as are the scenes they would suggest—were conceived in moods not very dissimilar : in hours, perhaps, when that which was borne in most strongly on the mind was the unfashionable truth that even in a time of busy ambition for material things, of earnest energy lavished on superficial pleasure, and, here in London, of a literary “realism” so far from reality that it is ignorantly proud to be bereft of tenderness, the deepest need of nearly every human life is, still, human affection.

“Orgeas and Miradou” has been passed through the *Nineteenth Century* and “The Poet on the Wolds” through the *Fortnightly Review*. “To Nancy” I have so essentially re-worked that I can scarcely with fairness associate it with the periodical in which it first appeared.

F. W.

London : October, 1896.



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# ORGEAS AND MIRADOU.





# ORGEAS AND MIRADOU<sup>1</sup>

## DREAM OF PROVENCE

ORGEAS and Miradou had lived together — together with no third — since the mother had gone from them; and that was thirteen years ago, when Miradou was five. Since then it was her father who had cared for her: the mother's name was never named between them. Had she died amongst them in her recognized place, they must from time to time have talked of her, as well as mourned. Those two hearts, made for affection—made for it so much that it was the air they breathed, the bread they

<sup>1</sup> The masculine termination of the feminine name is a Provençal characteristic. In Grasse, *Ave Maria!* is *Vou saludi Mario!*

fed on—must have kept of her their tenderest memory. Death, had he come to her there, could never have really separated them—could not have banished her from all their thought. Some communion still was possible. But the mother had no likeness to these two. Callous at first, and then a disgrace and a humiliation, she had gone out of their lives for ever. One luminous night, between two shining days of August, she and a Piedmontese lover had tramped towards Italy—by the long mule paths (was it?) and the olive groves, and then by the bare hills.

At first, of course, to Orgeas, the disaster had seemed irreparable. Out of doors, a shame greatest of all because the lover was no Grassois and no Frenchman, but of the hated Piedmontese—rivals in life, and, there in Grasse at least, rivals of necessity in labour. Indoors, it was a sorrow to be brooded on, and it

made a dire loneliness. The foreman came home from the printing press, and none but the little child was at home to greet him.

But the child had taken her place. Months passed, and life became endurable—years, and life became sweet. Parents and children in France are the best of friends generally; even when no special circumstance and no peculiar demand for affection, bring them more closely together. With Orgeas there was the special circumstance and the peculiar demand. Link upon link was formed, of interest, kindness, and association. That was the visible chain. But the invisible? Well!—they were parent and child, with a mysterious and profound affinity.

As Orgeas was not wanting in imagination, for a man of his class, he recognized that if, because of his deep love of her, Miradou sufficed for him, not in a measure

quite so unlimited could he suffice for Miradou. Her childish instinct for comradeship, her girlish longing for the confidence and gaiety that may exist between equals, Orgeas never restrained. She was helpful at home, in all material things, and in her recognition of his love for her altogether responsive. But there was no excuse for laying on her few young years the burden of later times. She was happy at home; and beyond home, in the great sunshine, in the sparkling Southern day, Miradou, with her clear eyes and all her figure's lines, laughed herself into womanhood.

Yet if, since childhood, she had known no trouble greater than the little bafflings which give a piquancy to attained pleasure, and no exertion harder than the labour which just sweetens rest, it was not circumstances that were at the bottom of that: no outside influence—not even a father's—had brought it about: it was

not produced to order. Some of her happy days she owed, of course, to the favoured land, and to the simple life, "cursed with no wide desires and spacious aims." How much she owed, besides, to her own nature, to her pure self and to no other, to her being that which she was—to her gay heart that under her glistening eyes danced in its joy of living! Orgeas knew that—knew that she brought to him a something, undefined, inestimable, which he had never given her. "Eighteen years!" he reflected—and he understood her well—and each year gained upon the last in bewitching merriment and the charm of an occasional and fitting gravity. Eighteen years in which she was warmth and light to him—the sight of her quickening his footsteps, her movements lifting his soul like a happy and familiar, yet ever varied air! Eighteen years, Miradou! And now she was dead.

Dead ; yet not dead. No ! dead she could not be. Her room indeed was empty ; her father, alone. But she was not dead. She would return.

“ On the ninth day,” said Orgeas to himself. He said it aloud, filling himself with courage. This was the fourth day only. “ On the ninth ! *Elle reviendra !*”

Yet it was true that two days since they had put her in her grave in the cemetery, and on the sun-smitten road, on the descent towards Draguignan, slowly, with hat in hand, as the chief mourner, Orgeas, with blanched face and dreaming eyes, had walked, with his comrades, behind the coffin of pine. And the upturned earth in the cemetery—hurriedly, loosely replaced—was fresh to-day, unlike every other grave, that had quietly settled, with its recording words, and cross of beads, and wreath of camomile. They had buried Miradou—though it was but so lately. They

had laid her down. How could she return?

If you had gone into her bed-room, in which Miradou died, if you had gone there that evening, you would have seen that though no sign of death or of calamity showed in the little chamber, there was a bed unmade and sheets disordered—a pillow with the imprint of a head, and, on the open bed, the lines, as one might fancy, made by the pressure of a figure light and tall. A brush, that was Miradou's, lay on the table. There were hair-pins there, and a ribbon. On a peg, near the window, hung Miradou's red pink gown : next to it, the broad hat, low crowned, of brownish yellow straw, which had sheltered her head from the assault of the sun.

That the things were left there so, and all the place untouched, when the owner of the things, who was the room's mistress, had been three days dead, was due

to a Provençal fancy—a faith to some, and by all outwardly maintained—that the hour our observation registers as that of death is not for this life after all quite surely the last. Is it the tenderness, perhaps, of a people who must owe something to Classic thought, and may copy Classic reticence?—the delicacy of those on whose memorials of the dead was never written the rude truth: dead they were not averred to be, but absent, journeying, called for a time to ways more distant than those their kindred had trodden—paths, nevertheless, from which return was not cut off. Absent, and on a journey: it could never even be hinted that they who had been loved here had finally gone. Yes: the Provençal adaptation of that tender Classic thought, the Provençal provision for a sentiment so deep that it must not be suddenly shocked, lay in this old tradition of a few days' grace—of a humane reprieve.



In some vague measure, death was sometimes a choice. If it was chosen hurriedly, might it not too be repented of?

Whatever may have been the case with the mass of his comrades, Orgeas followed in no merely formal manner the fancy of his land. He was a poet who had written no poetry. His careful common sense in daily life allowed him still to be a dreamer of high dreams. Anxious he was, but he was not thoroughly downcast. Until the ninth day, Miradou's fate was unsealed.

So much the popular belief contained to comfort him ; and to it he added his own, born of his knowledge of her love of life, of her gay heart, and of his great yearning. Placed in the grave but three days since—placed in the grave so lightly—she was wandering now. This was the time of suspense. When it was over, would she return to the life she had

gladdened, or to the dark tomb she had so shortly rested in?

For Orgeas, in his mood to-day, there could be but one answer. He paced from one to another of the rooms they had dwelt in—the little flat, high up in the cramped dark street, far up above its shadows and its straitness—his room, her room, and the living room. Back to her room again: the window opened wide, that her returning soul might find no obstruction. The caged bird she had tended sang in the sun, in its window-cage. Outside was the great sky, the tall cathedral tower, the bulky soap-works, the distillery chimney. Below, the olive gardens sloped in broad grey waves towards a waveless sea. It was all as it had ever been, these many years of his joy in her. And Orgeas's face brightened with confidence—a certain hope so soon to be realised. "*Elle se promène. 'Faut attendre!*" On the ninth

day, at the latest—before that—before the ninth day, *bien sûr—Miradou reviendra !*”

He went each morning to his work, punctually as usual. He got himself his breakfast. A neighbour, who pitied him—but with whose pity he was scarcely concerned—tidied his rooms for him, and made his bed, leaving the chamber of the absent untouched and sacred. It was not, of course, necessary—“*non vraiment ce n'était pas la peine*”—to think of any paid service. Soon the bright spirit of that so limited household would be again in the accustomed place. “*Bien sûr ! Elle reviendra.*”

And so the time went on.

The seventh day, he fancied his child upon her walk to Maganosc—upon the road acacias bordered, upon the great hillside, pursuing its almost level course some halfway up the heights, between plain and mountain ridge ; winding to a

ravine, and out again to a platform, a promontory, some spur of the particular hill ; yet always level, and tending slowly and with many a *détour*, towards Le Bar and the grey mountains. It was her favourite walk with her girl comrades or himself, upon a Sunday, and most of all in Summer and in that Provençal Spring which is a first Summer and a fresher one. She must be now upon that favourite road, tree-shaded, hill-shaded, richly screened from the great westering sun—with half Provence beneath her, its swelling lowlands, flowers and farms, and, last, in the great distance, the abrupt rising of the jagged Esterel, for a sharp horizon.

Just past the little Octroi, the road turned suddenly inwards, made for a minute as if to pierce the hillside, then thought differently, crossed by a high bridge the deep ravine in which a stream gurgled, and then turned to the right again, where, on the gentlest slope, just

close below, masses of violet plants grew under the light leaf of the olive, and by the trunks of the olive-trees stood the glazed water pots, burly as casks, holding the water with which the violet plants were from time to time moistened.<sup>1</sup>

This year the winter had been severe for Provence, and, notwithstanding the present splendours of sunshine, flowers were backward. Jonquils and violets alone strewed the floors of the scent-makers. They must wait still for the bushels of roses, whose labyrinthine budding had not begun.

On the left-hand side of the Maganosc road there was one place that Miradou had often paused at, just before the road along the hill-side made for the very depths of the ravine and then turned

<sup>1</sup> The right to draw water from the springs at the hillside belongs to each olive-farmer for short and fixed periods. Hence the necessity of storage in those fields which are flower gardens.

sharply, outwards again, towards the long village with its styleless church but quaint campanile—towards the vast olive gardens that sloped to the plain. There was an iron gate, high, elegant, and dignified, as of some old-world villa, and, within and behind it, a gravelled way, too broad for a footpath, yet now, by the great inroad of untended shrubs, too narrow for a carriage drive. Quickly the way curved a little—enough to prevent its further course from being seen from gate or high road. Unrestrained foliage of darker and of lighter green—some of the trees perhaps sun-smitten and some in shadow—made of the place a tangle and a mystery. You only guessed. Above the mass of greenery there rose just here at hand, by the very roadside, the grace of the eucalyptus—a shimmer of silver—and from some unreached recess the top of a sombre cypress lifted itself against the background of thickly clothed hillside.

Had there once been a villa there?—Miradou had wondered—was it now dismantled and done with? Or were the stately gate and the curved road and that particular garden but a secondary and now disused entrance to some greater property by the side of the hills? Not many steps along the drive, just within sight from the gate, stood, on a space of overgrown and neglected grass, a stone pedestal, like the base of a statue. In past years had some Diana, with her arrows, paused on the stone, a foot still lifted, but her chase suddenly stopped; or was there a lyre there, and Apollo; or had some slim figure of Silence put finger on lip in that enclosed place, wherein for long, amidst the wayward greenery, no step of man had stirred?

It was Miradou's garden—in her imagination long her very own.

At night, Orgeas thought of it—fancied it all, from the excluding gate on to the

statue's pedestal, and pictured every branch of every tree. There must be Miradou walking. And at night, when the breeze stirred, the eucalyptus boughs would sway in the darkness, and the sombre cypress perhaps would have a gesture, a bend to right and to left, as the tempered wind passed over it and was gone.

And now on the eighth day it was almost the dawn. Had Miradou left her garden as the daylight came to it? And the child was wandering—where?

An hour later, Orgeas looked out of his window. But the early morning sunlight, that was accustomed—all these recent times of the belated Spring—to make upon house front and shutter its shifting pattern of cool gold, was not visible at all. Clouds that were tangible mist drifted over the mountains—seemed for a time to have a substance solid almost as the earth's; as measurable, as



closely defined. Then there were heavy raindrops, and then a pelting of waters. The distance was clean gone, and suddenly the narrowed world of street and house-front was one uniform slate colour.

Again, that eighth morning, Orgeas trudged to his work. By midday there was sunshine. Where was Miradou? Seeking shelter from its white flash and blinding glare in the deep shadow and coolness of some always opened church—the Cathedral perhaps, or the Oratoire, or St. Thomas in the lane—the Sœurs de St. Thomas had taught Miradou, in their school, next door.

Most likely the Cathedral. Behind the altar, there, by the benches where the choristers practise, where the little organ is—the great one's deputy, in the western gallery. Yes; the Cathedral. She had her favourite picture there; she looked at it at Vespers; at Benediction it spoke

to her. Not Fragonard's famous "Feet Washing," which a chandelier obscured ; but Subleyras's "Assumption," with its touch of modernness and of the actual world—its observant crowd of Apostles who were *gens du monde* somehow ; its Virgin, a very pleasant, well-bred Frenchwoman you might meet in Grasse to-day, though dressed a little differently. That was so homely. Painted so, you could understand it, quite.

Or now—thought Orgeas, absent-minded, at his work—and silent, with no smile for any comrade, for the ninth day was drawing near, and his anxiety increased—now that it was afternoon, and the shadows were long and the ways cooler on the road to Auribeau, the downward road to the plain—now that it was that hour, was Miradou there, stepping past the rose gardens, past the orchards starred with the white of cherry blossom or flushed with *rose-du-Barry* bloom of

some early peach tree—a splash of colour thrown wantonly amidst the green and the gray—past the lowland meadows from amidst whose ampler herbage the chapel of Our Lady of Valcluse lifts itself, screened by trees? Did Miradou stop? Scarcely. Only twice in the year would anybody dream of entering the deserted chapel, pilgrim-crowded on its particular fête-day. She had come on to Auribeau, the massed village, perched on the pointed hill—gone on along the rising road past the cork trees that overlooked the bend of the river: the Siagne, limpid, green as a lake, lying deep in the ravine of the shadowed hills. There! was Miradou there? But when would she return again, and the little house welcome her, and the heart that was hers so wholly leap again for joy?

She was on no far-away journey. Distant Auribeau, more distant Gourdon—they had not seen her to-day. She

was nearing home now. Very close. She was waiting—was biding her time.

He knew it—Orgeas knew it. She was in their town to-night. On the Cours, by the terrace, or in the patch of city garden, by Fragonard's bust, or higher up, by the Provençal poet's—by Bellaud de la Bellaudière's. The lovers on the seat there, by the trees, in the darkness—as she passed, were they conscious of the ghost of her form? At least they were happier. She carried happiness as a garment. They were more joyful, or were more at rest—those lovers—never guessing the cause. For Miradou was there. She had passed, had turned, had paused. Very near was Miradou. Now perhaps under his own dark house-front, under the home of Orgeas: her step unrecognized only because it was silent; but surely there, amidst the clattering steps of the living.

The next was the ninth day.

After a night in which he had slept but little, Orgeas had risen early, and, having hurried his clothes on, had thrown wide the shutters, and into the dark chambers there streamed the morning. The day before, he had given out, at the printing press, that that day they were not to expect him ; he could not work that day, for that day she would come. Would it be possible, he had asked himself, before deciding it so, to fulfil his tasks as usual at each accustomed hour, and then, at nightfall only, to walk home, and a minute to settle it—there or not there ; come back and tired of wandering, or back no more for ever, and dead indeed ? That crisis was unendurable—to stake all in a minute, as it were, upon the hazard of the die ; the division between hope and fear, narrowed, refined, to a pin's point. It was not in Humanity to bear it thus, with such a suddenness of knowledge. He would walk himself

—and walk until he was done for. In the morning he would walk ; in the afternoon, would wait.

So Orgeas made his way, that ninth morning, along the very road whose every turn, when thinking of Miradou, he had most completely realised. It was the road to Maganosc, the road past her garden. He tramped along by the two forges, by the great coach-house, the hotel, and the Baronne's villa, and the English Church, and the Octroi, and the turning to Malbosc. He was well on the road to Maganosc now ; soon, the turn inwards, the railing and the wrought-iron gate and Miradou's garden ; the eucalyptus no breeze stirred, in the sudden radiant summer ; the stiffened cactus, silvery gray ; the magnolia ; the cypress black ; and, as he peered upwards, far above it, trees climbing the hillside, till at last, amongst limestone crags, only the pines held their own. The Summer was

come, to welcome Miradou back ; the overflowing ardours of the sun announced to Orgeas the new season ; and in the stainless daylight and the subtle air his hope was made a confidence. He walked, he almost sprang, up a steep olive-ground, and reached from it—and paced an hour—a level mule path, the country's ancient way. And from the mule path, through a mist of olive leaves, there was the warm and golden plain, and deep blue shadows of the Esterel, and leagues of distant water gleaming silvery in the fortunate day.

Coming down again, he talked to a peasant, and picked some flowers for Miradou, under the shade of the olives.

It was time to go homewards, now—fully time. One o'clock struck from Maganosc tower. It would be the beginning of the afternoon when he should arrive and be ready for her—his feet hurrying up the staircase, to her rooms in the narrow street: to Miradou's home.

She was not there yet, however. He found that when he got there. Of course not yet. But a little later. Orgeas sat in expectation. There was much to think about ; so much there would be to say to her. The time would pass, not very slowly. And she would soon come.

“ *Bien sûr,*” he said to himself, with the phrase of days ago—the phrase with which the lonely man had comforted the earliest hours of his threatened loss—“ *Bien sûr, elle reviendra ! . . . O ! pour sûr !* ”

He sat brooding, waiting. She must come before the sunset of that ninth, decisive day. Yes, it would have to be before the sunset. Sunset fixed it. That he knew.

But the sun was high yet—was it not ? It was well above the circle of the hills. He looked out of the window, and in the street he noticed where a certain shadow fell. He came back, and sat down. He



rose again, and wandered in and out of Miradou's room that was just as she left it; and sat again; and wandered. And then he went to his window, and out of it he leaned, and looked again for the shadow. How much longer the shadow! Yet, of course, there was time.

Orgeas was seated awhile, once more, in his own chair, in his particular corner. Facing it was Miradou's chair, and by Miradou's chair, her footstool. On the table stood the flowers he had brought for her. On the mantelpiece there was left, still—why of course there was left, still—a bit of her work. From her chair she had but to lift her hand and could take her work. That very night she would take her work. She was coming, now, to take it.

Surely it was not so light now, in the room, as it had been. No; it was not so light. Orgeas knew that. The light seemed creeping away.

The silvery sound of a church bell,

musical, soothing, struck him next. But it was Vespers. Was it, though, quite so late? Yes, it was Vespers—Vespers at the Cathedral. Well? Miradou must be there. She would be coming now. Certainly now. She was on the stairs, now.

Pale and the ghost of himself, for all his sustained trusting, Orgeas waited for her who was wandering ghost no more. A woman again; his child; his hand could press her. Her head was against his head. He held her wrist; feeling the throb of her pulses. The long, the long suspense was all but over. Miradou would be here.

It was getting darker now. It was much, much darker. Was there any colour in the flowers? And Miradou's print gown, that hung on a peg by the window—it was the child's red gown, remember—What was the colour of Miradou's red gown? Had the curtain any colour?

TO NANCY.



## TO NANCY.

WEYMOUTH,

*29th September.*

IT happens that I have seen much of you, Nancy, at an eventful moment—eventful for yourself I mean, in your life and your career—and here, because I like you, and like to think of and reflect on you, there is written down, straight and full, the record of my impression : concealing nothing, though written to yourself : a letter absolutely frank, looking all facts in the face ; for, young though you are, you are intelligent enough to bear them. My letter you may find tedious, perhaps, but at all events unusual ; for letters, even when detailed, generally omit much, hide some part of a thought—put the thing in

a way that pleases the writer, or is intended to please the receiver. Here am I at the end of my first page, Nancy, and all preface! Well, I shall recall, to begin with, how it was that I met you.

Acquit me, please, of any general love of your over-praised Music Hall. Neither it nor the Theatre counts for much in my life. I like you personally: I imagine a Future for you; but I am not anxious for "the status of the profession." Life, it is just possible, has other goals than that of being received in smart drawing-rooms—whatever Art you practise, its practice is your reward. Society, my dear, has bestowed of late upon the stage "lover" an attention that is misplaced. We are getting near the end of it: and, at afternoon teas, the *cabotin*, in a frock coat, no longer dominates the situation. Youths from the green-room have, in the Past, over the luncheon-

table, imparted to me, with patronage, their views about Painting; to me, Nancy, to your old friend, who has painted for thirty years—a full Academician one year since, with but few honours (as men call them) left to gain: few years, alas! in which to live to gain them. Child as you are, your common sense—that neatly-balanced little mind of yours, so unusually clear—that neatly-balanced mind assures you that it is not the profession you follow, but what you have been able to do in it, and what you really are, that gives you—I mean, of course, gives any one—legitimate claim to be in privileged places, to be motioned to the velvet of the social sward. “Artist,” indeed! As well expect to be received with welcome for having had sufficient capital to buy a camp stool and a few feet of German moulding with which to frame a canvas sent to the Dudley Gallery, as to be suffered to dictate and to dogmatise in

virtue of a well-worn coat and an appearance at a London theatre !

You have read so far, and yet I have not reminded you how it was that you and I came to know each other. It was just two years ago, in this same town from which I write to you. I saw a photograph that struck me, at the door of your place of entertainment—at the door of the “People’s Delight.” The face was young—but I have known youth. Pretty, it was—but a fashionable portrait-painter lives with prettiness. It was so monstrously refined !

At three o’clock, they said, there would be an entertainment—Miss Nancy Nanson would certainly be seen. And in I went, with a companion—old Sir James Purchas, of Came Manor—my host more than once in these parts. Sir James, you know, is not a prey to the exactions of conventionality, and there was no reason why the humble entertainment your



lounge and shelter offered to the tripper should not afford us half an hour's amusement.

The blazing September afternoon you recollect—September with the glare of the dog days. The “people,” it seemed, were not profiting that day by the “People’s Delight,” for the place was all but empty—everyone out of doors—and we wandered, not aimlessly indeed, but not successfully, among those cavernous, half-darkened regions, among the stalls for fruits and sweets and cheap jewelry, in search of a show. A turn, and we came suddenly on rows of empty chairs placed in front of a small stage, with drawn curtain; and, at a money-taker’s box (for reserved seats, as I supposed)—leaning over the money-taker’s counter, in talk with someone who came, it may be, from a selling-stall—there was a child, a little girl. Sir James touched my arm, directing my attention to her,

and I took the initiative—said to the little girl: “We came to see Miss Nancy Nanson. You can tell us, perhaps, when is the show going to begin?” “There won’t be any entertainment this afternoon,” the girl answered; “because, you see, there isn’t any audience. I am Miss Nancy Nanson.” The dignity of the child!

The fact was, you remember, that photograph at the entrance gave the impression of a girl of seventeen; and I did not at all connect it with the figure of the silver-voiced, well-spoken, elegant child, who proved to be yourself—since then my model and my youthful friend. But the moment you spoke, and when my eyes, still not quite used to the obscurity, took in your real face and those refined expressions, the identity was established, though the photograph, with its dexterous concealment, showed more the Nancy Nanson you were going

to be, than the Nancy Nanson that you were. I was pleased, nevertheless ; and we talked about yourself for a few minutes ; and when you said (because I asked you) that there would be an entertainment next day, I told you we would come to see it, certainly. And Sir James was indulgent. And I am a man of my word.

And now there is a bit we can afford to hurry over ; for the next stage of our acquaintance does not advance, appreciably, the action of your story. We came ; we saw your entertainment : your three turns : singing, dancing : and pretty enough it was ; but yet, so-so. You were such a pleasant child, of course we applauded you—so refined, yet singing, tolerably, such nonsense. Even then, it was your charming little personality, you know—it was not your performance that had in it attractiveness. Next day, I left the neighbourhood.

For two years after that, I never saw Miss Nancy Nanson, "vocalist and dancer"; only once heard of and read of you—only once, perhaps, thought of you. The once was last Christmas—your name, I saw, was advertised in a pantomime played by "juveniles." I might, it is just possible, have gone to see it. But the average "juvenile!"—think!—and then, the influenza and the weather!

Well! this present glowing September, Nancy—glowing and golden as it was two years ago—brought me again, and very differently, into touch with you. The Past is over. Now I fix your attention—for you are still patient with me—I fix your attention on the Present, and I point out to you, in detail—I realise to myself—how the time is critical, eventful; how you stand, Nancy, upon a certain brink. I am not going to prophesy what you may be; but I tell you

what you are. The real You, you know : something better and deeper than that which those seven pastels, any or all of them together, show you—my delighted notes of your external beauty ; touched, I think, with some charm of grace that answers well to your own ; and mimicking, not badly, the colours and contours of your stage presence. Nothing more. Chance gleams—an artist's "snap-shots" at Miss Nancy Nanson, vocalist and dancer, at sixteen. (Sixteen yesterday.) But *you*—No !

This present September—a fortnight since—I came again to Weymouth ; this time alone ; putting up at the old "Gloucester" (it was George the Third's house) from which I write to you ; and not at Came Manor in the neighbourhood. In the Weymouth of to-day one is obliged, in nearly every walk, to pass the "People's Delight"—your cheap vulgarity, my dear, that the great Georgian time would

have resented. I passed it soon, and the two names biggest upon the bills were, "Achilles, the Strong Man"—there are things in which even a decayed watering place cannot afford to be behind the fashion, and the "strong man" is in fashion to-day—"Achilles, the Strong Man," then, and "Miss Nancy Nanson." Again did I go in; took the seat, exactly, that I had taken two years since, in the third row of chairs; and while a band of three made casual, lifeless, introductory music, I waited for the show.

The curtain rose presently on a great, living, breathing, over-energetic statue—a late Renaissance bronze, by John of Bologna, he seemed—that muscular piece of colour and firm form, that nigger, posed effectively, and of prodigious force. "John of Bologna"—but you never heard of him! Then he began his operations—Achilles, the Strong Man—holding, and only by his teeth, enormous weights;

and rushing round with one, two, hundredweight, as if it were a feather; lifting, with that jaw of his, masses of iron; crashing them on the stage again, and standing afterwards with quivering muscles, heaving chest. Applause—I joined in it myself in common courtesy—and then the curtain fell.

A wait. The band struck up again—it was your first turn. A slim and dainty figure, so very slight, so very young, in a lad's evening dress, advanced with swiftness towards the footlights, and bowed in a wide sweep that embraced everyone. Then you began to sing—and not too well, you know—a song of pretty-enough sentiment; the song of a stripling whose sweetheart was his mother. His mother, she sufficed for him. It suited your young years. A tender touch or two, and with a boy's manliness. Applause! You vanished.

You vanished to return. In a girl's

dress this time, with movements now more swift and now more graceful. Another song, and this time dancing with it. It was dancing you were born for. "She has grown another being—and yet with the old pleasantness—in these two years," I thought. "A child no longer." In colour and agility you were a brilliant show. I have told you since, in talking, what I thought of you. You were not a Sylvia Grey, my dear; still less that other Sylvia Voltaire praised, contrasting her with the Camargo. The Graces danced like Sylvia, Voltaire said—like the Camargo, the wild nymphs. No! you were not Voltaire's Sylvia, any more than you were Sylvia Grey. Sylvia Grey's dance is perfect, from the waist upwards—as an observant actress pointed out to me, with whom I saw it. Swan-like in the holding and slow movement of the head and neck; exquisite in the undulations of the torso. Where Sylvia



Grey ends—I mean where her remarkableness ends (for she has legs like another, I take it)—you, my dear, begin. Your modelling wants an Ingres to do it justice. The slimness of the girl, and what a fineness, as of race; and then, the agility of infinite practice, and sixteen young years!

A third turn—then it was that you were agile most of all. The flying feet went skyward. Black shoes rushed, rocket-like, so far above your head, and clattered on the floor again; whilst against the sober crimson of the background curtain—a dull, thin stuff, stretched straightly—gleamed the white of moving skirts, and blazed the boss of brightest scarlet that nestled somewhere in the brown gold of your head. Then, flushed and panting, it was over.

Next day, in a gaunt ante-room, or extra chamber, its wooden floor quite bare, and the place furnished only with

a couple of benches and a half-voiceless semi-grand piano—the wreck of an Erard that was great once—in that big, bare room, Nancy, where my pastels since have caught your pose in lilac, rose and orange, but never your grave character, I came upon, and closely noted, and, for a quarter of an hour, talked to, a sedate young girl in black—a lady who, in all her bearing, ways, gesture, silver voice, was as refined as any, young or old, that I have been in contact with in my long life—and I have lived abundantly amongst great ladies, from stately, restful Quakeress to the descendant of the “hundred Earls.” No one is more refined than you. This thing may not last with you. Whether it lasts, depends, in great measure, upon the life you lead, in the strange world opening to you. Your little craft, Nancy, your slender skiff, will have some day to labour over voluminous seas.

You remember what you told me, in the great ante-room, standing by the wreck of the Erard, that your fingers touched. All your life to that time. You were frankness absolutely ; standing there in your dull, black frock that became you to perfection ; standing with hat of broad, black straw—the clear-cut nose, the faultless mouth, the bright-brown hair curled short about your head, and the limpid look of your serene eyes, steadily grey. It was interesting, and amusing too, your story. I told you, you remember, how much you had got on, how changed you were, what progress I had noticed. And you said a pretty “Thank you.” It was clear that you meant it. We were friends. I asked who taught you—so far as anything *can* be taught in this world, where, at bottom, one’s work, one’s progress, is one’s own. You said, your mother. And I told you I’d seen your name in some London Christ-

mas play-bill. "I had a big success," you said. What a theatrical moment!—the one occasion in all my little dealings with you in which I found the traditions of "the profession" stronger with you than your own personal character. Now, your own personal instinct is to be modest and natural; the traditions of "the profession" are to boast. You did boast, Nancy! You had a big success, had you? Perhaps, for yourself; I do not say you failed. But the piece—my dear, you know it was a frost. Did it run three weeks? Come now! And someone, out of jealousy, paid four guineas—she or her friends did—to get you a bad notice somewhere in backstairs journalism. And they got it, and then repented of it. You were friends with them afterwards. But what a world, Nancy!—a world in which, for four guineas, a scoundrel contributes his part towards damning your career!

You remember, before I asked if I might make some sketches of you, you were turning over a song that had been sent you by "a gentleman at Birmingham." He had had it "ruled" for you, and wanted you to buy it for three pounds. It was "rather a silly song," you thought. I settled myself quietly to master the sense, or, as was more probable, the nonsense, of it. My dear, it was blank rubbish! But you were not going to have it, you said. "Mamma would never buy a song I didn't like and take to." That was well, I thought. And then you slowly closed the ruined Erard, and were going away. But on the road down-stairs, remember, I persuaded you to ask your mother that you might give me sittings. I told you who I was. And in the gaunt ante-room, lit well from above, I had a sitting next day. It was the first of several. And your mother trusted me, and trusted you, as

you deserve to be trusted. And we worked hard together, didn't we?—you posing, and I drawing. And there are seven pastels which record—*tant bien que mal*, my dear—the delightful outside of you, the side the public might itself see, if it had eyes to really see—the flash of you in the dance, snow-white or carmine; and I got all that with alacrity—“swift means” I took, to “radiant ends”—the poise of the slim figure, the white frock slashed with gold, the lifted foot, and that gleam of vivid scarlet in your hair against the background of most sober crimson.

This tranquil Sunday I devote to writing to you, is the day after your last appearance at the “People's Delight.” You and your mother, very soon, you tell me, leave Weymouth and your old associations—it is your home, you know—and you leave it for ever. The country, you admit, is beautiful, but you are tired

of the place. I don't much wonder. And you leave it—the great bay, the noble chalk Downs, the peace of Dorset and its gleaming quiet—you leave it for lodgings in the Waterloo Road. For you must be amongst the agents for the Halls. Though you have been upon the Stage since you were very little, you have but lately, so you say, “put your heart into it.” Well! it is not unnatural. But no more Sunday drives into the lovely country, recollect, with your brother, who is twenty-one and has his trade; and your uncle, who is in a good way of business here, you said—your uncle, the plumber.

And so, last night being your last night, Nancy, it was almost like a Benefit. As for your dancing, you' meant, I knew, to give us the cup filled—yes, filled and running over. I had noticed that, on some earlier evening, when Little Lily Somebody—a dumpling child, light of

foot, but with not one "line" in all her meaningless, fat form—when Little Lily Somebody had capered her infantile foolishness, to the satisfaction of those who rejoice in mere babyhood, someone presented her with a bouquet. And you danced, excellently, just after her—you, height and grace, slimness and soul—and someone, with much effusion, handed you up a box of chocolates. And you smiled pleasantly. I saw there was a little conflict in your mind, however, between the gracious recognition of what was well-enough meant, and the resentment—well, the resentment we can hardly call it: the regret, at all events—at being treated so very visibly as a child—and yesterday you were to be sixteen! So I myself—who, if this small indignity had not been offered you, might conceivably have given you, in private, at all events, a basket of fine fruit—I meant to offer you flowers. It might have been



fruit, I say, if smuggled into the ante-room where I had done my pastels; for I had seen you once there, crunching, quite happily, imperfect apples between perfect teeth—your perfect teeth, almost the only perfect things, Nancy, in an imperfect world.

But it had to be flowers. So I sent round to the dressing-room, just as you were getting ready, two button-holes merely—wired button-holes—of striped carnations, red or wine-coloured. They were not worn in your first turn. They were not worn in your second. In your third turn, I espied them at your neck's side, in the fury of your dance. Already there are people, I suppose, who would have thought those striped carnations happy—tossed, tossed to pieces, in the warmth of your throat.

Your second turn, last night, you know, was in flowing white, slashed with gold—old-gold velvet—with pale stockings.

The third—when the flowers died happy in your riot—in pure white alone, with stockings black. You remember the foot held in your hand, as you swing round upon the other toe—and one uplifted leg seen horizontal, in its straight and modelled slimness.

My dear—what were my little flowers? Who could have known—when you had finished—the great things still to come? When the applause seemed over, and the enthusiasm of some subaltern from Dorchester was, as I take it, abated or suppressed—when the applause was over, a certain elocutionist (Mr. Paris Brown, wasn't it?) brought you again upon the stage, and saying it was your last appearance, made you some presentation: a brooch from himself, "of no intrinsic value" he informed us—I willingly believed him—a bracelet from I don't know who—that *had* an "intrinsic value," I surmise—and a bouquet, exquisite! It

was "From an admirer," Mr. Paris Brown, the elocutionist, read out, from an accompanying card. Then he congratulated you upon your Past; prophesied as to your Future; and, in regard to the presents to you, he said, in words that were quite happily chosen—because, Nancy, they were reticent while they were expressive—"She is but a—*girl*; and she has done her duty by the management. Long may she be a credit to her father and mother!" Your mother I was well aware of—your mother I respect; and you, you love her. But your father—he was invented, I think, for the occasion, as an additional protection, should the designs upon you of the admirer from Dorchester prove to be not altogether such as they ought to be. The precaution was unnecessary; it was taking Time by the forelock. Our young friend looked ingenuous, and smitten grievously—you seem so big upon the

stage, Nancy—so grown up, I mean. I could, I think, have toned down his emotions, had I told him you were a bare sixteen.

Nancy, there is—for me—a certain pathos in this passage of yours from childhood into ripening girlhood ; a book closed, as it were ; a phase completed ; an ending of the way. “What chapter is to open ? Nancy Nanson—what phase or facet of her life,” I ask myself, “is now so soon to be presented ? What other way, what unfamiliar one, is to follow her blameless and dutiful childhood ?” I had a restless night, Nancy. Thinking of this, one saw—ridiculously perhaps—a presage in the first bouquet, a threat in the first bracelet—in the admirer’s card. Would she be like the rest ?—at least, so many of them. Besmirched, too ?

Remember, Nancy, I am no Puritan at all. I recognise Humanity’s instincts. There is little I do not tolerate. I

recognise the gulf that separates the accidentally impolitic from the essentially wrong. But we owe things to other people—to the World's laws. We have responsibilities. *Noblesse oblige*; and all superiority is *Noblesse*. "She must not be like the rest," I said, last night, in broken dreams; "dining, winking, leering even, since sold at last and made common." In broken dreams, last night—or in wakeful hours—your feet tossed higher; your gay blood passed into the place—electrical, overpowering. You can be so grave and sweet, you know; and you can be so mad.

Have you ever lain awake, in the great, long darkness, and watched in the darkness a procession—the people of your Past and all your Future? But you have no Past. For myself, I have watched them. My mother, who is long gone; those who were good to me, and whom I slighted; the relations who failed

me ; the friend I lost. And the uncertain figures of the Future ! But the line of the Future is short enough for me—for you, it is all yours. Last night, it seemed to me, the dark was peopled with your enemies ; with your false friends, who were coming—always coming—the unavoidable crowd of the egotistic destroyers of youth. Their dark hearts, I thought, look upon her as a prey : some of them cruel, some of them cynical, yet some of them only careless. And I wished that last night had not come—your sixteenth birthday—with the applause, and gifts, and menacing triumph.

There are women, perhaps, men cannot wrong—since they have wronged themselves too much. “ This is a good girl,” I said ; and my over-anxious mind—in real affection for her—cries out to all the horrid forces of the world : “ Leave Nancy ! ”

Nancy, when you read this, you smile—

and naturally—at your most sombre friend. You think, of course, with all the reckless trust, courageous confidence, of girlhood, “So superfluous! So unnecessary!”

Go the straight way! . . . Whatever way you go, I shall always be your friend.

CLEMENT ASHTON.

*[I have obtained access to a remaining portion of the Correspondence between this distinguished member of the Royal Academy and Miss Nancy Nanson of the Variety Stage. I see that the young lady's are the more numerous and the shorter letters; and in them, as they proceed, I seem to discern some change of tone—a rather quick transition or development (call it what you will), which, if it is really there, is unlikely to have escaped the eye of her correspondent, and may perhaps have pre-*

*pared him, in a certain measure, for an incident which, nevertheless, disturbed him seriously. That at least is my own reading of the letters in the round hand of Miss Nanson. But I am possibly wrong.]*

WEYMOUTH :

*September 30th.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON

As I suppose you leave Weymouth to-day I will send this to London. It is only to thank you very much for your long letter and your kindness to me, in which Mother joins. I hope you are well.

I remain yours sincerely,

NANCY NANSON.

MR. CLEMENT ASHTON.

100 YORK ROAD, WATERLOO ROAD.

*Oct. 24.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON

I thought I should like to let you



know that I have come to London. I have not an engagement yet, but have a Pantomime engagement in view.

With best wishes I remain yours sincerely

NANCY NANSON.

CLEMENT ASHTON, ESQ: R.A.

100 YORK ROAD, WATERLOO ROAD.

*Nov. 5.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON

I was so sorry I was out when you called. If I had known you were coming, I would have stayed at home. We are very comfortable here, thank you. The landlady is awfully nice. I would come and see you if you appointed a time.

I think you will be glad to hear that I'm engaged as principal girl for the Pantomime at the Theatre Royal, Hoxton, by R. Solomon, Esq. In about a

month we shall begin rehearsing I am engaged for eight weeks.

We hope you are well.

Hoping to see you soon, with my best wishes, in which Mother unites, I am yours very sincerely

NANCY NANSON.

100 YORK ROAD, WATERLOO ROAD.

*November 20.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON

It was so kind of you to take me to the Theatre yesterday afternoon. I must write to tell you so. How nice Miss Annie Hughes was! She makes you laugh and cry. I like her more than any actress I have ever seen. The man was funny, wasn't he!

Thank you again. With best regards from Mother, believe me yours sincerely

NANCY NANSON.

*P.S.* I am to do an extra—Saturday—at the Bedford, Camden Town, and

have an early turn next week at the Washington, Battersea. I am very pleased, as I am tired of "resting." When we go to Hoxton we shall take lodgings where there is a piano. I have been practising an acrobatic trick for the Pantomime. The public likes them. The Theatre Royal, Hoxton, is more for the masses than the classes.

THE WALK, HOXTON,  
*Christmas Day.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON

O! thank you for remembering us on Christmas Day. I was so pleased. We hope you will come to see the Panto. It went very well last night. I go very well so far. My voice sounds splendid here. It is not lost in the glass roof, as at the "People's Delight."

I have been so very, very busy rehearsing, I have seen very little of Hoxton yet, so I do not know how I shall like it.

I shall know better soon; now that we have started the Panto.

With best wishes for a happy Christmas from Mother and from me, I am yours sincerely and gratefully, in haste,

NANCY NANSON.

THE WALK, HOXTON,  
6th January.

I am glad you came to see me yesterday afternoon. How did you like me? But it was so flat. I am sorry you came to a *matinée*. Half the house are mere *children*, then. In the evening it is different. And they cut out part of my song yesterday. It made me cry—I was so cross. I generally jump about *much* more. I am much merrier. Mother and I shall be so pleased if you have time to come again.

Sincerely yours in haste,

N. NANSON.

P.S. Mr. Solomon wants to engage

me for next year, he says. And for *better money*.

THE STUDIOS, WESTMINSTER,  
7th January.

DEAR NANCY,

No, I did *not* think you were up to the mark yesterday. It was a *ragged* performance. I write, of course, frankly. First then, as to your singing,—I never very much believed in that. But you would sing much better if you knew that you sang badly. You would then understand that I was serious when I told you, what you really wanted was singing lessons. Voice *production*, my dear. And your speaking voice is excellent. You used it well upon the whole, yesterday. A little careless, I thought—a mistake sometimes, in the emphasis. But what is pantomime dialogue! I will come again, if you like me to see you, and you

will do all that better. For agility in dancing, for vivacity in action, you seemed as good as it is possible to be. And you take in every point—even yesterday I noticed, you believed in every bit of the story. To do so, and to live in it, is the foundation of an actress. Yes, with your intelligence, with your alertness, your quick life, actress just as much as dancer you may very well be.

You come to Westminster, next week, any morning except Wednesday. I must make one more drawing of you. Not a pastel this time. I have long since done with pastels of you. They are good as far as they go. Your colour and your dress, your movement and your pose, they record not at all unhappily. But I want a careful drawing—a drawing in line—and shall make it perhaps in pencil; perhaps even in silver-point. You are such a strange, variable child, you see—

there is not one subject in you, but a hundred; and I shall not be contented till I have, somewhere else than in my memory, the eyebrow's line, the delicate low forehead, the fine nose, half Greek (and it gains so in character as you throw your mind into your work)—all that and the curve of the open nostril. This moment, they are at my fingers' ends. And your grave sweetness!

Frank, is it not? Yet I am not a foolish person, making up to you. I am not a vulgar flatterer of the first prettiness in the street. You know how much I am an artist—heart and soul, my dear—by which I mean, that unlike too many of my brethren, I am not only a painter.

Your “notices” are good, I see. Very good. I congratulate you. The time is coming perhaps when you will *patronise* me—when you will even be so very great that you will quite “cut” me. “No,

no," I hear you say—indeed you said it when I saw you last—"No, no, Mr. Ashton, I should never do *that!*" You say it with your voice—and with your steady eyes you say it even more.

Until next week, then!

I am sincerely yours,

CLEMENT ASHTON.

THE WALK, HOXTON,  
10th February.

DEAR MR. ASHTON,

Mother says, How long since we have seen you! You said you would come again to our Panto. Since that, remember, I have been to Westminster, to sit to you. They are going to publish one of the drawings, are they? You will put my name to it, won't you?

Saturday is my last night. Mother says, Can you come then? I shall have all my admirers. And the boys in the



gallery—though you say I sing so badly—all the boys in the gallery taking up my song. After Saturday, I am booked for the Halls.

Yesterday I was taken a long drive to Hagley Wood. It is near Barnet. I have had a great deal of attention here.

I am yours very sincerely,

NANCY NANSON.

*P.S.* Mr. Ashton, we allow you to say anything. Be sure and tell me what you think, if you come Saturday.

THE STUDIOS, WESTMINSTER :

*Sunday, 16th Feb :*

MY DEAR NANCY :

Yes, you allow me to say anything—for a lifetime divides us—and because I am a friend of yours I shall say the bare truth. I saw you yesterday, as you know, for you espied me from the stage. From the point of view of a theatrical success,

the thing was quite undoubted. You were a mass of nerves. You came across the house to us. The footlights ceased to be. Your effect was extraordinary. Shylock's "How much more elder art thou than thy years!"—the thing he said to Portia—is a remark which may be made, no doubt, with reasonableness, to many little ladies at the theatre. There is nothing like the theatre for ageing you. You, Nancy, are now, not five months, but two years older than you were last autumn. At first I was afraid for your health. That last time that you came to me, to the studio, your face was quite drawn: not only its expressions, its very lines, had aged. You were pale; you were worn. And sixteen!

But yesterday that was all right, again; and, Nancy, it was the deeper *You* that had altered. I—I was always an idealist, remember, and so you will forgive me.

I go down to the grave, when my time comes, poet, after all, far more than craftsman. Those changes, more or less, that I notice in you—those changes not for the better, I mean—I was never blind to the possibility of them. Idealist though I am, I foresaw them—I foresaw them, with forebodings.

There was my first long letter to you. It will be well, perhaps, that I shall not say anything more in detail. But read that again—the last part of it, I mean. Do so—and be warned.

But no—the detail shan't be spared you ; though what it really comes to—I tell you from my heart—all that it really comes to, is, that you will be “spoilt.” “Spoilt”—or “ruined?” You are so sensible in many things. Clever, I don't know that you are, except in your profession. It all runs in that one channel with you. Quickness of “study,” closeness of observation, immediate faultless power

of mimicry, vivacity, agility in the dance—all *that* we know ; and then at home your sensitiveness, your quickness, and your helpful tact. But as to books, as to pictures, as to music beyond your showy music of the theatre, as to the things that happen in the world, and that interest people—these things are all nothing to you. Who can wonder ! Your whole little eager heart is in your work. Your work is your play too—and the whole of your play. But a thirst for admiration, my dear, and vanity ! Will you split, like the others, on that rock ?

Last night, your face had new expressions. There were things I never saw in it, before. In that palace-scene, the slim young thing—how queenly you were, in the white silk, spangled with silver : how queenly, and withal a little contemptuous, a little scornful ! I watched you, Nancy, with a keenness horribly inconvenient for you—or the scornful look, the bored look,

the *blasé* look (I have said the worst that I can say) would have passed perhaps unperceived. They were there.

Again, you acted to the house too much. I am not finding fault with you technically for that—though you did, I think, overdo it. I am talking to the girl, and not to the stage character. There was one look at the Boxes: at a private Box rather—but I spare you.

Now who on Earth can be the people who have had this influence upon you?—hour by hour; drop by drop, I suppose: here a little and there a little—in the life I begin to hate for you. . . . But it is no use hating it. I suppose that I could take you from it, if I liked. I have the money to—no overwhelming claims on me. But you would leave all this unwillingly: and, in the end, *ought* you to leave it?

My dear Nancy, I will spare you any more. But in my letter, read what

I have not actually written. Imagine yourself talked to, very gravely: fancy yourself receiving a *good, long, serious* talking to. Think! Think! I have finished.

My dear child, you are a good girl at heart, you know—and such an eager little fiery one, when you are not grave and sober. The stuff is in you out of which they make Sisters of Charity. The stuff is in you out of which—But No! Why?

I am your old and fatherly, your *grand-*fatherly friend, if you prefer it—

CLEMENT ASHTON.

*Tuesday, Feb. 18th.*

MY DEAR MR. ASHTON,

I cried so much when I read your letter. For you have been very kind to me. I suppose I deserved it.

NANCY.

BURFORD PLACE, EDGWARE ROAD,  
*Thursday, Feb. 20th.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON,

We have moved. Until I get into a burlesque at Easter, I am working the Halls. This week, Sam Collins's at Islington. On Monday I have a new song at the "Met."—the Metropolitan, in Edgware Road; nine o'clock. I do a new dance. Mamma has made me a new dress—heaps of pink roses, on dull black. Also at Gatti's, Westminster Bridge Road, at 10.15.

Sincerely yours and gratefully,

NANCY NANSON.

BURFORD PLACE, EDGWARE ROAD,  
*Tuesday, Feb. 25.*

The engagement at Gatti's only lasts a week, Mr. Ashton. And I am not to be in the Burlesque, at Easter. They say that I am too refined. Am I not going to be a favourite, then?

We have our ups and downs—haven't we? I have tried for that music-hall kept by that faddy lady, the philanthropist. She is very *severe*. Why, she won't let you take up your skirts, even! I say, and *Mother* says, she ought to keep a *chapel*—not a music-hall.

NANCY.

BURFORD PLACE, EDGWARE ROAD,  
*March 5th.*

DEAR MR. ASHTON,

It was very nice of you to come to tea with us, and then to say that you *enjoyed* it. It was *nothing* to ask you to! Another time we shall be differently situated. I have a new engagement, with *much* better money. You can see it in the *Stage*. I was recommended by a gentleman. He seems to have a great deal of influence. Mamma doesn't like him, I'm afraid. *I* sometimes wonder, Is he really nice? Really!



The engagement began the night before last. Two turns after me, Queenie Perkins comes on—the star of the Halls, you know. She is very rough. You would say, *rude*. She's not a *bad sort*, perhaps; but—*well*!

Last night, she had a cold, and couldn't sing. She has it often. If I had a bad cold, I should go straight to bed, and take hot Bovril. Queenie does different. She stays away, of course; but finds the only thing for *her* is having supper with her friends, at Restaurants, in Regent Street.

Mr. Ashton—I shall *never* try that! But Queenie Perkins goes to supper every evening, with three gentlemen in tall hats.

To-day I was photographed, in dancing dress. In seven positions. One of them *such* a strain. And they kept me in it so long, I had to say, "Look sharp! Hurry up! That hurts me, you know.

I can't keep like that." The man *was* cross.

In dire haste,  
N. N.

BURFORD PLACE.

You were always kind to me. I want to see you. Mother is wild. And you, *you will never forgive me.*

From  
NANCY.

WESTMINSTER,  
18th April.

MY DEAR NANCY,

Well!—I have been; have seen you; seen your mother; have come back; and, all to-day, have thought of you.

At least I hurried to make the matter smoother for you at home, though, sooner or later that would have been managed,

anyhow ; for you and your mother are at one, generally. She is so really fond of you, and you of her. I have not done much for you.

And now what *can* I do ? I know very little of what happened, after all. I avoided knowing it. My business—if I have any—is to wait. “Did I,” I ask myself, “lose any opportunity of action ?” Could I have stepped in, to stop you ? Nancy, I talk brutally, though I would not know, with definiteness, any detail—but the valuation set by me on chastity that is of the body alone—were it that that was in question—might be perhaps three half-pence. One friend at all events you have, between whom and yourself no mad outrageous freak of yours, could raise insuperable barriers. And you feel that.

Some people might ask, then, Why was I concerned, months ago, for your Future ? I will tell. The deterioration, the slow

change in you, that must be coming or have come; the undermining and deterioration, I say—that is the deep injury, the thing that I foresaw—the thing to mourn about. You are at home with the vulgar, and are familiar with the bad. My very words draw round you like a curse. I haven't the heart left to sketch in words a sure decline. . . . And, if I had, why should I overdo it?

This escapade of Wednesday—something or other (and I won't know what) with the man who helped you to your new engagement—whatever happened, Was it done by you for gain, for sudden greed, for ambition, for vanity? Answer yourself—not me. If it had been done for love—well then at all events I might have thought of your Future differently. If even, just for pleasure!

Nancy, I must make excuses for you—excuses in any case. Once in your short life at least, you have been near to Want

—that winter you and your Mother came out into the Strand, from the empty treasury of a bogus Management, with sixpence in your pockets, instead of a salary. Yes, sixpence it was—that was your salary. You told me so yourself. And your voice “went” in that cruel Winter weather, as the little figure, with its slender grace, slid through the fog and blackened rain and reeking river mists of December in London. After that, Money, which seems to some people a small thing in the distance—so sure, so unimportant—must have loomed large and of *immense* importance, in the near foreground, to you. “Better money.” I’ve learnt your phrase—it sounds almost a Heaven to you.

Again, of course, we have our moods. We may be taken unawares. Judgment goes—principle. All your life, Nancy—with only trivial exceptions, after all—your life is good to this hour. And in all our

lives, every day has its own difficulties : every hour is a choice. Good and diligent, and sweet and bright, wise too and helpful—week after week, month after month, you answer to your helm : and then there comes one hour which leaves you rudderless. I should be hard on you indeed, if I remembered only that hour—if I forgot the ninety and nine. My dear Nancy, I am *not* hard on you !

It is late at night when I write this. And, in my thoughts, you have been with me the whole of the day. The story can't be an unusual story—and I am a man of the world, or ought to be. No, the story can't be an unusual story : but the girl is an unusual girl.

Well, you must live it down, my dear—must have done with it—forget it. But then there is the deterioration—*some* deterioration at least—that made the thing possible. And what more may be possible—mend and patch and cobble as we

will? The little Nancy! And I have seen you wince at an untimely and presuming stare—wince and shrink like a wind-buffed flower.

All day you have been in my thoughts. When I was setting my palette in the morning: arranging the light: screwing up the easel, waiting for the sitter, who was late—they are always late—I thought “She has made a mess of it—poor little Nancy—foolish minx!” I was very silent with my sitter. I was scarcely even polite. She noticed it; and it affected her. The sitting was a failure. I bowed the lady out—Nancy Nanson in my thoughts. The luncheon table was all wrong: not a thing as it ought to have been. “Nancy Nanson, at the Devil, poor girl!” A walk in the streets, afterwards. The omnibuses rattling past me in Victoria Street. “Nancy Nanson—is it all up with her?” Nothing else. The bell of Christ Church, Westminster, a tinkle for

Evensong. "The day goes on, then ! Nancy Nanson !" Afterwards, in the quiet of St. James's Park, near Birdcage Walk, the clear sound of the bugle—the recall to barracks. "Nancy Nanson !" And then, the space of the Park water, calm, as I saw it from the foot-bridge, by the five poplars—and the April evening sky, clear and serene. "Nancy Nanson at the Devil—poor girl ! The Devil, perhaps. The dear and clever, irresponsible child !"

Nancy, I've no more blame for you. The vials of my anger are poured out. Months ago, I said, "I shall always be your friend." "Go the straight way !" I said. And I believed you would. What a collapse if I must say to you to-night, only this word,—*"When you most want me, count on me !"* But only to say—that !

Nancy !—with deep regard and real affection,

CLEMENT ASHTON.



*Post-script.* But I can't end like this. For when you want to be reproached the least, some of my sentences sound hard. Be hopeful! For, as it seems to me—the more I think of you—whatever happened, the quite irreparable has *not* happened. And,—if it had! Surely, surely, you can forget, for ever, one mad hour! And, from whatever point, you can begin “the journey homeward”—to yourself. You can be the real You again; the real Nancy—your very characteristic, the perfection of the contrast between the wildness of the theatre and your happy quietude.

You were a little fool the other day, were you not? And you were on deep waters. But I believe that you did *not* go under.

And so, dear Nancy—and in any case—it's at home I must think of you. With that golden wig, that adds—piquantly perhaps, and yet abominably—to your

years, the maddening dancer is put off. The brown-haired child, in the plain dress, is in her place—the short brown hair, the quiet eyes, the tender, sensitive mouth. Your lodging-house parlour is ornamented with a play-bill, and photographs are stuck about the mantelpiece—Miss Marie Dainton, is it? and your uncle, the plumber; and, again, a celebrity of the Halls; and somebody else, who was nice to you, a year ago, at Weymouth; some comrade you were fond of: “She’s a dear girl,” you said. In the lodging-house parlour, your mother sits beside the fireplace, combing out the golden wig, after its last night’s service. The kettle, in preparation for tea-time, not far off, is at the side of the fire. It begins to sing. You, Nancy, sit beyond the table, on a cane-bottomed chair; with your knees crossed—as I saw you, that first time I called on you in London. Your hands, so young, so nervous, and so highly bred,

smooth out upon your lap a bit of wool-work, that you—whose instinct is to please and to be pleasant—are doing for your landlady. And, in the glow of the fender, lies curled up, warm and sleeping, that grey kitten rescued from misery, four days before, by you : won to you by your magnetism, or your kindness—they are both the same. In the morning, when your mother leaves your bed—leaves the tired child, worn out by the theatre, to an hour's extra resting—the soft grey thing, that you bewitched and cared for, creeps to your side—is happy.

Did they ever teach you, at your school,  
I wonder, verses of Wordsworth on the  
stock-dove ? What did the stock-dove  
sing ?

He sang of love with quiet blending,  
Slow to begin, and never ending ;  
Of serious faith, and inward glee.  
That was the song—the song for me !

Nancy !—the spirit of the stock-dove's song lies in the deepest heart of Nancy Nanson.

C. A.

*Scarborough, Oct., '95—London, July, '96.*

# THE POET ON THE WOLDS.



## THE POET ON THE WOLDS.

*[The short and in some cases scarcely connected Notes which here follow, are taken from amongst the papers of the poet, one of whose more serious experiences—as a few readers may remember—forms the subject of “The New ‘Marienbad Elegy’” in a volume called “English Episodes.” The Notes now printed have for me a somewhat melancholy interest, as, if not quite the last, they must certainly be almost the last little writings of my friend which I shall be permitted to see. England is no doubt rich in poets, of major or minor importance, but he who was once a not un-hopeful candidate for the Laureateship—he with whom, and with whose belated fondness for Miss Sylvia Rawson, “The*

*New 'Marienbad Elegy' was concerned—is no longer with us. A victim of the dire pest which we were wont to speak of very foolishly as "the fashionable malady," my friend died, after a few days' illness, in the Ides of March.*

*In common with so many of his acquaintances, I was myself suffering at that moment from the complaint which slew him. I had been in communication with him on the Saturday of one week—on the Wednesday of the next he was dead. He died lonely in his rooms in Half Moon Street. He was fifty-nine years old.*

*One, though not perhaps the most essentially important of the objects of my friend's ambition, remained unattained; but though the Laureateship never came to be his, he was talked of kindly at our Club, the "Times" and "Standard"—not to speak of weekly organs—recorded his achievements in well-disposed paragraphs, the "Daily Chronicle" with admirable*



*promptitude devoted a column and a half to the final settlement of his position, and it is now possible that Mr. Onslow Ford may be commissioned to execute a bust, which some gifted literary brother of my friend—not perhaps entirely insensible of the uses of advertisement—may eventually unveil, with a neat speech. My friend does not go wholly unrewarded, and a character much misunderstood during his lifetime, by reason of the irony inseparable from intelligence and the vanity inseparable from literary pursuit, is likely, I think, in the near Future to have justice done to it. Unaccustomed to wear his heart upon his sleeve, he was, during his lifetime, too little credited with the depth of emotion that was really his.*

*In regard to the brief Notes to which my present words are a lamentably lengthy introduction—and one that he would himself have condemned, for his demand was ever for terseness—they would appear to be*

*memoranda made during one of the many visits paid by the poet to houses in the country. The particular visit of which we are accorded scanty glimpses here, was paid, at Whitebarns, in the East Riding, in October, 1894—more than a year after that Buxton sojourn of which record has already been published, and about five months before his death.*

*Like "The New 'Marienbad Elegy,'" these later memoranda chronicle his private thought, and so, it may be, throw a little further light on the character of my friend. They would seem to point to the fact that with Walter Savage Landor, he "Nature loved, and, after Nature, Art." And when one considers the not unappreciative comments upon "Florence" and "Adela"—the latter was his hostess on the Wolds—comments made, as I have indicated already, some twelve months after the record of his devotion to Sylvia Rawson—fresh confirmation would seem*

*to be afforded of the generally entertained theory, that, in the male breast, the existence of an abiding passion is not incompatible with the pleased recognition of what may be a merely temporary charm.*

*But his Notes shall speak for themselves.]*

### *Visits.*

I find that visits tire me dreadfully, unless I know my host or hostess well, and there is nothing of a house-party to whose ways I must conform, and of whose momentary and artificial *ensemble* I must form a part. It used not to be so. But now, although directly I am in it, I like the company of men and women, the tax Society levies on my strength tends to increase. I grow consciously old. A lonely man at home, it might be thought I should prefer the table, the drawing-room, the country houses, of others, to the silence of my rooms or the casual

conversation of a Club. There are moods in which I do. But seldom is a visit over with me—a country house visit—without my vowing to myself that though I like it, I won't undertake it again. It disturbs work. It throws you into an atmosphere never really your own, and to be changed again so soon—and that is tiring. Why then am I at Whitebarns?—I might fairly ask myself, were I naïve enough to exact that conduct should square always with conviction. And the answer? They do not expect too much from me at Whitebarns; and though I do not know them intimately, they are at least sympathetic. The “they” of the last clause, perhaps, is Adela. She, if she likes me, likes me for myself; not for the reputation based on books written by the “me” of fifteen years ago. This is at least refreshing. And when I met her as a bride, at Lady Wimpole's a year since, young Mrs. Pontifex had never

heard of me—that was refreshing too. And now, in my own mind, because I like her, she is “Adela.” But we have no real friendship. Her cousin, Mildred Summers—who is staying here—and Florence too—who lives in the neighbourhood—I know much better. Mildred I analyse, and find her interesting since complicated. Florence is only sunshine; nothing else—and I do not analyse sunshine. Besides Mildred Summers and myself there is at present but one guest—a very constant one—and that is Lady Sledmere, Adela’s mother, to whom our young host, Pontifex, is dutiful. The Bishop is to be here, it seems, for a day or two, before I go; and—not with him, I hear—a certain Mr. Ullmann, an influential person in the West Riding constituency Pontifex represents. For myself, I await the Bishop. Time will prove. He may be over busy with his Visitation.

*October Morning.*

I love their autumn garden in the sharp bright morning, when sunlit lawns, still dewy, lie patched with greyish silver. In the border, by the pathside, full-blossomed stocks, lilac and puce-coloured, stand sturdily above the mould. At breast-height, over its mass of rich green leafage, the dahlia shows a crimson face to the sun. And in the brilliant air, uncertain, intermittently, flutter the wings of the last butterfly.

*October Afternoon.*

It is late now in the afternoon, and the light, level again, but warm and mellow and diffused, strikes the bared, slender limes, glows in and out among the thinned leaves of the chestnut-trees, with their embrowned gold against the solid black-green yew ; the leaves not thinned only, and all their form revealed, but rustling crisp and dry, with their life spent and

their days numbered—a frosty night, an autumn rainfall, an October wind, a sudden breeze even, and down they eddy or down are swept, and the tree marks one stage more of Autumn's triumph.

*October Sunset.*

The great tract of the sky, in this October sunset, is empty, clear, and colourless—luminous still, yet with neither form nor flush—but, just above the line of the horizon, a single pile of cloud masses itself, solidly steel-blue, broken only once by a bar of saffron. Below a sky so vivid, positive, defined so sharply, the land itself, at this approach of evening, looks less material than the heavens. Except in the near foreground nothing is certain. Here, the long garden wall, the terrace, the lawn with its trained yew-tree, are things to touch and to be sure of; beyond them, seen from this

place, raised moderately above the river, but less high than whatever the ascending road next skirts—beyond them is the landscape of a dream. You surmise in it, no doubt, some rolling miles of English farm and woodland. Patches of hazy gold say it is autumn. Water gleams somewhere; but, in the vagueness, only memory tells you it is a stream not great enough to dominate a landscape, and not so small as to be lost in it.

*Mildred.*

Four various impulses do battle in the heart of Mildred—wage in that breast of hers their long, uncertain fight. A girl of her intelligence must crave at times for steady, intellectual progress. It is natural that she should feel the fascination of present pleasure. All the best of her womanhood finds itself at peace in the consciousness of tender deeds. Blind



instinct drives her to be fashionable. Charged with ideals so unstable, so many, and so much at variance, how can she quite succeed? May not life, so weighted, tend to be little else than an unwilling compromise—a concession, graceless after all, and finally barren?

*The Bishop.*

I should be well content for the Bishop to stay longer. He goes to-morrow. All that he promised to be, from manner and face, in the one sermon I heard him preach in London, he assuredly is. Of ecclesiastical pretensions, not a trace; not a trace either of that exaggerated *bonhomie*, that “going one better” in permitted worldliness, which, out of pure affability no doubt, is apt to be, in social intercourse, a trick of favourite Divines. This man is weighted by his task. He is too earnest to think how to conciliate; and the impression that he makes he

never recognises. What does conciliate, is not an intended word, a prepared attitude; it is his whole being. We like him for what he is—the incarnation of devotedness to labour, and of common sense. His words, all strong and straight. Roughish, manly, energetic—breathing heavily, lumbering along: a whale in a drawing-room, but, in the country, a banner and a sword. . . . And the English Church has “had its day,” has it!

*Sufferers.*

Good-natured folk of small experience and narrow understanding, lavish continually their sympathy on the incompetence of fools. Had Heaven granted them a wider vision, they would have some pity for the capable—on whom fools wreak their mischief. . . . The Bishop said at lunch something of this kind. I put it down as best I can.

*A Wold Farm.*

These great farms of the Wolds—of which a dozen make the estate of Pontifex, my host—are many of them of six hundred, some of a thousand acres. Much of the land is corn-land, potato field, and turnip field, but much of it, upon the long backs of the hills, bare sheep-walk, crossed by the white chalk road—a main road here, and here and there a cart track—and dotted with low thorn-trees bent with the great wind from the eastern sea. The grey stone farmhouse, with its whitewashed out-buildings, shows itself after perhaps a lonely mile; substantial, square with its enclosed walled garden and its great hay mows, a whole group of them, and behind them—a screen from the north, a screen from the grey east—a cluster of ash-trees, and here and there, statelier and more luxuriant, a sycamore.

*Postman.*

The rural postman, who lives at Dugleby, a mile from Wharram, starts on his rounds, from Wharram station post-office, at half past eight, and, walking seventeen miles over the Wolds, delivers and collects from house to house at Burdale, Sledmere, Fimber, and between these places, on his road, and finishes again at Wharram at about half past three. His daily task, in August heat, in autumn rains, in sharp hard winter, and when in the late springtime the snow lies thickly, still, about the feet of the Wolds. I walked with him to-day from his last lonely farm to Wharram Station.

*Mr. Ullmann.*

Now what on earth has Mr. Ullmann, the new guest, to do with Whitebarns—Whitebarns with Mr. Ullmann? Does Lady Sledmere tolerate him as a matter of policy? It must be that. And she

stretches a point in doing it. He is a thinly-cultivated *nouveau riche*, with—in place of serious intelligence—an affable but wearisome inquiry for “anything fresh.” The fine, the simply beautiful, the merely true—that has no charm for him, or value ; it is just the fresh. Semi-German and Radical, fiercely and ignorantly atheistic, a hater of the thing that is, calling aloud, with cheerful shallowness, for “Progress,” you feel by everything he says—yet more by everything that he ignores—that he is but a parasite on English Life : no part of its organism.

*Death and Mr. Ullmann.*

Mr. Ullmann is not well. As persons scarcely destitute of ordinary feeling, we are anxious, of course, that even Mr. Ullmann shall be spared as long as possible to a world whose Past and Present he considers misguided, and for whose Future he is willing to legislate. But

one thing we are sure of—that when, whether to-day or ten years hence, Death claims Mr. Ullmann, it will be found that he has left instructions to be carefully cremated, and, above all, “with no so-called religious ceremony.” For that would be an insult to his penetration. His masculine good sense must assert itself to the end, and not for *him*, at all events, the procession through the churchyard, and the words which less emancipated souls have been accustomed to receive as of august comfort—“I am the Resurrection and the Life.” The quiet churchyard—“I am the Resurrection and the Life.” But it is painful to contemplate the possibility of such an affront, offered to the intelligence of Mr. Ullmann!

### *Judgments.*

When it is given to me to hear a woman pronouncing any judgment on a man, in matters of the sexes, I am, I fear,

a little apt to consider, With how much wisdom a seal would legislate for a butterfly! . . . I said something of that sort to Mr. Ullmann, over the cigarettes; but that intelligent *doctrinaire* rejoined, crushingly, that he considered women to be the equals of men. It was not their equality that I was doubting, for a moment—only their similarity.

*Sources of Wisdom.*

One is amused, sometimes, when one considers what are the different standards people appeal to—the things or persons they are most in sympathy with: the sources for them, therefore, of all wisdom. With some, the source of wisdom is the favourite clergyman—who must be Ritualist, if he is not Evangelical. With others—with the very young man about Town, for instance—another man still more “about Town”: a senior by five years or so: a Court of

final Appeal. With some of us it is Lord Bacon, with some of us the poets, with some the Bible, in which (sane men agree, indeed) Poetry utters its profoundest note. "What is it with Mr. Ullmann?" I asked myself at lunch, having perforce to hear his voice, and looking at him for a minute over feathery chrysanthemums. He finds no wisdom in the Church—not even benevolence in her—no wisdom in the recorded thought of thoughtful men; in the lessons of History; in the illuminations of Suffering; no wisdom in the poets. So much superior is this good man to those who have gone before, that he invents—and naturally—his own panaceas. But if there is a voice to which he listens with deference—well, I think it must be—the voice of eager and disquieted Radical women, shrill and rapid on the platforms of the manufacturing towns.



*Florence.*

Florence, last night, drove over here to dinner. I was glad to sit at her side. Some people say of her that she distributes smiles. But to put it so, is to state the matter amiss. It is rather that when she is present you feel you are happily wrapped in the one great smile of her delightful personality.

*October Trees.*

Now, in this mid-October in the North, you have the gold and green of the horse-chestnut, the yet more varied tints—and some of them much deeper—of the beech, the russet limes, the beauty of the witch-elm, and here and there the copper of the oak-trees. There is little change in the sycamore, and little in the ash—they shed their leaves much later, shrivelled with unsuspected dryness; the green just dead and gone, and in its place no autumnal warmth.

*Wind in the Yew-Trees.*

To hear the wind most soothingly, with its shrewdness softened, you must hear it in Italy, through a grove of cypresses, or in the country of the Wolds, through an Irish yew. When the October wind blows hardest, lower and higher boughs do but touch each other with the slow gentleness of old-world figures in a ceremonious dance—they are but plumes that nod, but velvet that touches velvet.

*Adela.*

The nice young thing is happy with her husband, with her married life, and in her country house, her good-natured and large society—she is quite happy in all these, in her unexacting way. But just sometimes, when some one not superior to, indeed, but still a little more flexible, impressionable, or magnetic, than the people she is accustomed to live with, crosses her path for an hour, some further illu-

mination of her face, some prouder and more joyous consciousness of self in her blue and radiant eyes, betrays that liking to give pleasure which is instinctive and innate in the most womanly women, and shows her momentary sense of the existence of a great vista—a vista Adela will never explore.

*Pontifex.*

Ruddy and square-shouldered, big-calved and large of hand, a yachtsman and a golfer, as well as a sportsman, Adela's husband suggests good nature and much long sound sleep, the morning tub, a hearty breakfast, and a perfect incapacity for physical fatigue. He is off, now, with his shooting party—will tramp the fields till dusk—while Adela is practising the songs of Chaminade and Valérie White, which soothe our evening hours. To-morrow he will go to London. And, as I said before, they have found for him

—his mother-in-law, rather, has found for him—a seat in the House. He is not an ardent politician, but the extremely wide-awake connection who guides his steps considers that when a young man goes to Town it is better he should have something definite to be busy about. “You know, it keeps him out of mischief,” his mother-in-law, Lady Sledmere, declares to me, quite frankly. But in the character of Adela I find a more satisfactory basis for the stability of the *ménage*.

*Lady Sledmere.*

By what freak of Heaven has it been ordained that Lady Sledmere should be the mother of Adela? I don't know that these two have anything in common, except good nature and good sense. I trace in their features, their expression, no similarity. And can it be that Adela's artistic and rebellious locks, of freshened gold, will acquire, one day, the heated

yellow and the coarser texture of the maternal *coiffure*—that Adela's light step will develop ever into her mother's uncompromising tread? Yet Lady Sledmere is admirable in her own way. The old-fashioned Evangelical, of times gone by, would have described her as "worldly." But she is not conspicuously selfish; she is absolutely honest; not even especially pleasure-seeking; and quite without a vice. How then "worldly"? Would not the Evangelical have been mistaken? Not so completely as it seems. Lady Sledmere has but transferred to others those wishes for material benefit she might have concentrated on herself. For Adela, for Pontifex, for any child that may be born to them, she invokes the good things of our present world, its more material possessions. Not the capacity to enter deeply into learning, poetry, music, art; and not the spirit that would spend itself in helpfulness and

charity. But social prestige ; it may be, Court favour ; wealth at least undiminished ; the easy pleasures of the passing day ; a life prolonged to its last limits, and after it—the vague, the vague ! There, Lady Sledmere stops wishing.

*Affection.*

What may have first brought Pontifex and Adela together I know not. But does it greatly matter ? The more I see of them the more certain I become that they are to-day happy ; and as I prepare to leave them, I ask, with little apprehension of the answer, “Should not that happiness last ?” They are both so unexacting ; and, though Adela’s is the gentler and more sensitive nature, both are at bottom good. Seeing their happiness — remembering too, that they would scarcely claim to be beyond the commonplace—I think, at moments, even now, of one who was not commonplace

at all. And of *her* happiness—Sylvia! But her happiness is secure. It lies in her own nature. She and I shall meet no more.

I am supposed to be successful. In Society I can contrive—not always artificially—can contrive to be gay. In the street, sometimes of an evening—in the street in London, or here on the village high-road, or on the paths of the Wolds—I see two people, husband and wife, it may be; lover and sweetheart; father and daughter, perhaps—linked together happily. Arm in arm, with one thought. And with so little ambition. Just—satisfied. I am supposed to be successful. I have exerted an influence, and have a position. It is difficult to say what things will last; but perhaps not all my verse is jerry-built. And I have known men, and have appreciated women. To whom do I belong? Or need I belong to no one? A deep question!

But, anyhow, on my way through life, in these later, elder years, as I leave one group and just perhaps touch another, yet adhere, as it seems, nowhere—having a second place in so many friendships, yet with no soul who would want me first in all the world—I begin to feel the situation. Others have something lasting. Nothing lasts, perhaps, for me, but the green earth I am fond of, and the healing air—the wind which is music always, as it beats over open land—and the great pageant of the sky, whose beauty I worship. Yes; an unending spectacle, an immense Presence. . . . But its response to me—where?

Could we but always remember that we are not so separate as we seem—that it is we who make ourselves separate!

*Marseilles, March, '95—London, April, '96.*



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[P.T.O.]

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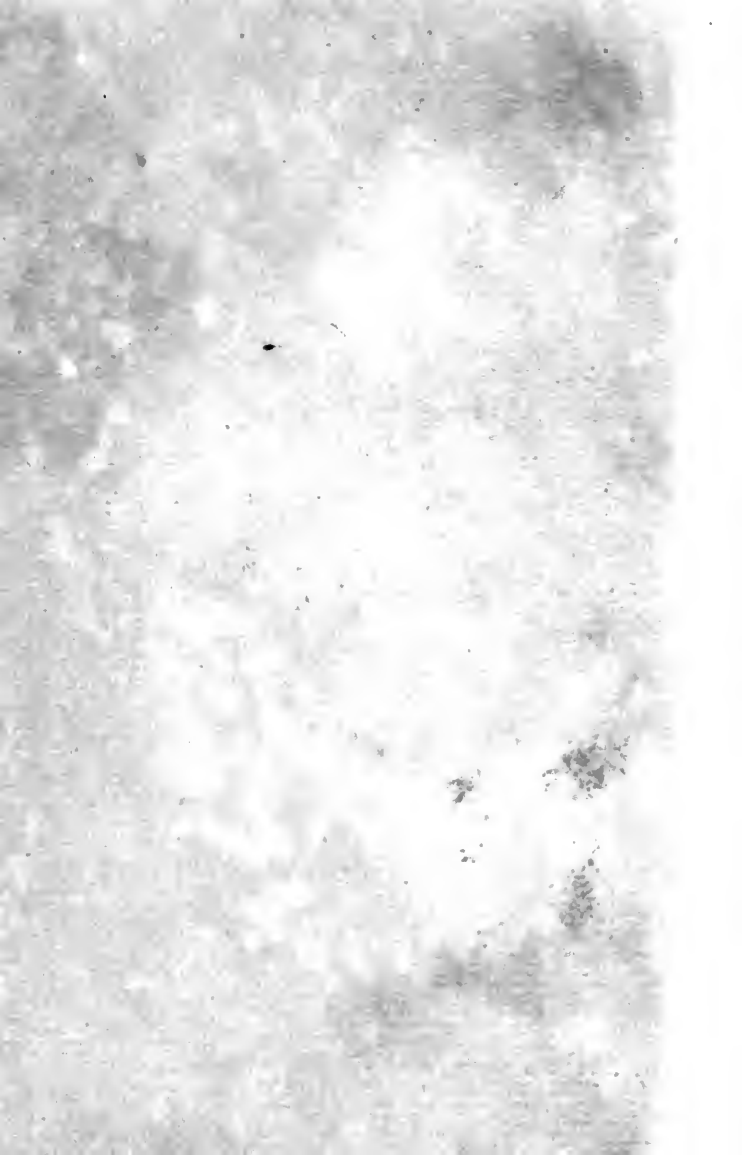
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